

The Gathered Church (5) - Gathered for Praise

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 01] Let's begin our worship. We're singing firstly today in Psalm 66. Psalm 66, that's in the Sing Psalms. That's on page 83 of the Psalm books. We're singing to a tune, Golden Hill, verses 1 to 6.

Shout loud with joy to God, all earth your chorus raise. Sing loud the honor of his name, and glorious make his praise. Speak thus to God the Lord, how great your works of power.

For so overwhelming is your might, that foes before you cower. You can see from the bulletin sheet that the focus of our study this morning of God's Word is on praise. The church gathered together for praise, to praise the Lord. So the Psalms reflect that in the references to praise as we sing them today. So Psalm 66, if you're able to stand, please stand to sing.

Sing loud the honor of his name, and glorious name.

G ■■■■■■■■■■aff vid ange77. Sing outputs, ring■agle hog Pray to stand, but seldomodiver give such broken heart.

[1 : 41] Our greater works of power, so overwhelming is your might That goes before you can Alert, God's hand to you This signal of your pain They never cease to celebrate

The glory of your name Come see what God has done This mighty works of power His deeds to watch the human race Have lost unto the old To let his people pass On blue blue waters cross

He turned the sea into my land Let us rejoice in God Now let's pray briefly before the children go through to their Sunday school Our gracious God As we give thanks today That you have gathered us together In your name that is our desire And our delight to be here We thank you for the privilege of being able to do so We ask Lord again your blessing for our children today In each and every one of them In all their classes And all the things that they learned today about You help them we pray To apply this to their own young lives And once again we pray That their spiritual and moral development Will continue under the teaching of your word And we ask that all those who teach them

And give of their time Will be rewarded by your own blessing And not that we seek Lord to be rewarded For the work that we do for you But nevertheless you promise That you will bless those who serve you And seek to make your word known Even to all ages So bless the children today we pray And give them today To know your own spirit working in their young lives Hear us we pray In Jesus name Amen I'm going to read a couple of verses From Judges The book of Judges chapter 6 And this is about Gideon Gideon Because I know that Sunday school Today are beginning Gideon In their lessons For a number of weeks At least I've looked at the schedule And that's what's down I'm sure that they're keeping to that If possible So I'm going to read from Judges chapter 6 Just two or three verses The Lord saying to Gideon The Lord turned to him and said Go in this might of yours

And save Israel From the hand of Midian Do not I send you And he said to him Please Lord How can I save Israel? Behold my clan is the weakest in Manasseh And I am the least in my father's house And the Lord said to him But I will be with you And you shall strike the Midianites As one man Now as you come to learn about Gideon And various things that happened in his life It's such an important part of the book of Judges Because in a sense it summarizes what the book of Judges is about And I want the young folks today just to think of two things In relation to Gideon I'm sure you'll learn a lot more as you go through the lessons From Gideon's life But here is the Lord saying to Gideon To go and save Israel from the Midianites The Midianites The Midianites were people who had been attacking Israel And had come because they had great numbers And were attacking them and destroying their crops

[6 : 56] Or taking their crops All sorts of things that really provided so many difficulties for the people of Israel It really was the people's own fault in a sense Because God was annoyed with them Because they had really gone after other gods And stopped saving the Lord the way they should But here the Lord is saying to Gideon Go and save Israel Now the Lord's calling That's what we usually say The Lord's calling of Gideon Is something that applies to all our lives Even our young people today I mean you young folks and all of us too Are being called by God through the Bible to serve Him Not necessarily to be great leaders in the church But everybody has the opportunity and the responsibility to do something for the Lord The Lord is calling us all to be His servants To serve Him in some way or other And you young folk today In your young days That's your privilege too To serve the Lord in whatever way you can

To do things for Jesus So I want you to pray this prayer Not just today But throughout your whole life really It's a prayer that goes something like this Lord, please help me to be obedient to your call Lord, please help me to be obedient to your call It's a prayer everybody, adults as well, needs to pray But for young folks today Pray this prayer for yourselves Lord, help me to be obedient So whatever the Lord calls us to do We should always pray Lord, help me to be obedient to that And then Gideon said That he was too small That he was not really strong enough to do this And he said How can I save Israel?

My clan is the weakest in Manasseh And I am the least in my father's house You see what they're saying I just don't feel I can do this It's too big for me It's too big a task I am the smallest in my father's house And my clan is the smallest in Manasseh You're asking me to do such a great thing I don't think I can do it What did the Lord say to him?

He said The Lord said But I will be with you In other words Gideon was to think Not about his own ability But God's strength That's the second prayer I want you to pray for yourselves as well As your young lives go on Lord, make me strong to be your servant Make me strong to be your servant So these are the two prayers Help me to be obedient So that I can serve you And make me strong to be your servant These are two very simple but important prayers That you learn from the life of Gideon So pray these prayers for yourselves And do what you can to serve Jesus As your lives go on Now we're going to say the Lord's Prayer again together Let's say the Lord's Prayer Our Father which art in heaven Hallowed be thy name

Thy kingdom come Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven Give us this day our daily bread And forgive us our debts As we forgive our debtors And lead us not into temptation But deliver us from evil For thine is the kingdom And the power and the glory forever Amen It's great to hear all you young folks saying that Prayer and reciting it like that But you can pray it for yourselves of course as well Let's sing again to God's Praise Psalm 135 this time Page 425 Singing to a tune Gainsborough Verses 1-6 Praise ye the Lord The Lord's name praise His servants praise ye God Who stand in God's house In the courts of our God In the courts of our God Make abode Psalm 135 and verses 1-6 To his praise Praise ye the Lord Praise ye the Lord

[11 : 17] Praise ye the Lord The Lord's name praise His servants praise ye God His servants praise Praise ye the Lord His servants praise ye God Who stand in God's His servants praise ye God Who stand in God's The servant's praise ye God Who stand in God's Our sing the courts God, our God, make a word.

Praise ye the Lord, for he is good, and to him praises sing.

Sing praises to this King, because it is a pleasant thing.

For take up to himself the Lord, take truth of his good pleasure, and he hath chosen Israel for his peculiar treasure.

Because I know assuredly the Lord is very great, and that our Lord, above all gods, in glory hath his seed.

[13 : 41] What things so ever pleased the Lord, but in the heavenly King, and in the earth, the seas and all, the places deep at thee.

Let's read God's Word together now from Paul's letter to the Colossians. Paul's letter to the Colossians, chapter 3, and we're going to read the first 17 verses.

Colossians, chapter 3, from the beginning. If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Set your minds on the things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you, sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

[15 : 19] On account of these, the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away, anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.

Do not lie one to another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices, and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, but Christ is all and in all.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another, and if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other.

As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

[16 : 28] Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you are called in one body, and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

And so on, may the Lord bless to us that reading of his own word. We're singing once again, this time in Psalm 104, on page 374, singing to the tune Kilmarnock from verse 31 down to the end of the psalm.

The glory of the mighty Lord continues shall forever. The Lord Jehovah shall rejoice in all his works together. Earth, as affrightened, trembleth all if he on it but look.

And if the mountains he but touch, they presently do smoke. I will sing to the Lord Most High so long as I shall live. And while I being have, I shall to my God praises give.

[17 : 42] Of him my meditation shall sweet thoughts to me afford. And as for me, I will rejoice in God, my only Lord. From earth let sinners be consumed, let ill men no more be.

O thou my soul, bless thou the Lord. Praise to the Lord, give ye. These verses, the glory of the mighty Lord. The glory of the mighty Lord, continue shall forever.

The Lord Jehovah shall rejoice in all his works together.

earth, earth as affrighted, trembleth all, if he on it but look.

and if the mountains he but touch, they presently do so.

[19 : 17] I will sing to the Lord Most High so long as I shall live.

And while I be in half, I shall to my God praises give.

Up in my meditation shall sweet thoughts to me afford.

And as for me, I will rejoice in God, my only Lord.

from earth let sinners be consumed, let ill men no more be.

[20 : 45] O thou my soul, bless thou the Lord.

Praise to the Lord, give me. Now please turn with me to Colossians chapter 3, passage we read a short time ago.

Colossians chapter 3. And today we're looking mainly at verse 16. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Obviously that's a text that stands in a run of verses that focus on certain things to do with our service for God. And the focus especially here is on the word of Jesus dwelling in his people richly, but that's combined with singing praises to God, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness.

Now as we've been looking for a few weeks at the topic of the gathered church, we're thinking especially of the church as gathered as we are today, and some of the features of the gatherings of the church, and what is important for us to bear in mind and to practice in the gatherings of the church as we form part of that.

[22 : 17] Last week, for example, we looked at being gathered for prayer and how important it is for the church not only to pray, but to be gathered for prayer, to have gatherings where prayer features strongly in them, and even gatherings for prayer and not much else but prayer.

And today we're looking at the church gathered for praise, which is particularly an emphasis here on singing. The church gathered for praise.

This evening, God willing, we'll look at the church gathered for growth from Ephesians. So the focus really is on singing, but it runs right through here from verse 16.

As we've said, it's a run of verses from there down through to verse 17 especially. And it's important to notice the connection, the very close connection in this verse itself, because there's no full stop.

It's just a series of commas. Notice the connection, therefore close connection, between teaching and singing. Teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom.

[23 : 24] And then immediately it says singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your heart to God. So there's a very close connection there between the church gathered together, as we've seen before, to listen to God, to listen to God's word being proclaimed, and for prayer as well.

A close connection here as well with the teaching that we receive from God's word and the singing of praise to God, because they very much are dovetailed together and should be so in our thoughts as well.

Singing does not replace preaching. But nevertheless, even in the singing of the praise of God, there is a very strong didactic or teaching element to it, because you're learning things as you're singing.

We're learning things together as we're singing together. And as we'll see, the importance of singing together carries with it so many benefits for us individually, which come from being together to sing the praises of God.

Of course, singing is one main feature of the gathered church for worship, but it's a very important aspect of the church's gathering for worship, along with reading the word, and the word being expounded in preaching, and prayer to God, that is the element of singing together the praise of God.

[24 : 51] And basically, that is what comprises our worship services, our public worship. And it's important that we think of participation and not performance.

I don't mean by that, that our singing should be anything but of good quality. But the singing is not a performance. We don't have a choir. Not that there's anything wrong with a choir in itself in certain contexts.

But we don't have a choir. We have a presenter to lead the singing rather than a choir, and there's good reason for that. And when you go to a concert, for example, or nowadays what's called a gig, you go there basically as observers of the main item, which is whether it's a band or whether it's an individual, whatever.

But you're going there as observers. And even if you're participating in the sense of singing in with some of what's being performed on stage, you're basically there to observe them.

They're the main feature of the gathering. But in the gathered church, gathering for praise means we are all collectively and equally involved, participating in that praise of God.

[26 : 06] We don't come to church to sing the praises of God by just listening to others sing the praise. It's a participation. It's congregational praise. The whole congregation participates in it.

It's a feature of many congregations now that they have a praise band. I'm not necessarily saying I disagree with that entirely, but the congregation's praise is important as congregational praise.

And if there is to be a praise band, and I'm not saying by any means that there should be or is to be, it must never be a performance by the band performing to the congregation.

Because we come together to congregate as those who wish to praise God collectively. And whatever else we say as features of sung praise to God, and there is a place outside of congregational worship, public worship, for many of these other things, even what I've mentioned there.

But coming together today is for congregational praise. And what a brilliant privilege it is to hear good congregational praise as we sing that praise together.

[27 : 23] We come together to praise the Lord congregationally. And you notice the plurals here in this passage, showing that it's together that these things are done.

Teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom. Singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts, plural, to God.

They are all features of the gathered church, gathered to praise the Lord. And that means everybody should sing. Does it mean singing even if you or I are saying, well, I don't really have much of a voice, so I don't think I should participate in the singing?

There is no reason at all, biblically, why anybody should feel themselves left out of joining in and participating in the praise, in the singing of praise to God.

Your voice may not be the best voice in the congregation. It may be something even of a croak, as far as you're concerned. But still the Lord is calling upon us to sing His praises. And we sing together the praises of God.

[28 : 30] I've heard some people even saying, none of the congregation here, but I've heard some people suggesting that if you're not converted, you shouldn't be singing the praises of God. That is only for the Lord's converted people.

Where do you find that in the Bible? We gather together today to praise the Lord. That means each and every one of us contributes and participates in the praise of God.

Even if we're saying today, but I'm not yet a professing Christian, even though I'd like to be, I'm still not there. You might even be saying to yourself, I'm not even yet saved, I'm not converted.

Well, I hope that's something you attend to soon, because you should. But the one thing you must never say is, I'm not a professing Christian, or I'm not converted, so I don't really think I should take part in the singing of praise.

There is nothing in any part of the Bible that I know of where the Bible says, let's come together and sing the praises of God, but you who are not yet professing Christians are not involved in that.

[29 : 33] It's congregational, friends. It's congregational praise to God. And as we meet together here today, all our voices should be together raised in the praise of God.

Now here we have in this verse another feature that we sometimes find difference of opinion on, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

And some people take that to be a reference to the church being at liberty to compose songs other than you find in the psalms. And that, of course, is true and has been true for generations.

But it's also true that these words, psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are features of the book of psalms, because all of these titles are used in the book of psalms to describe different categories of psalms.

And that's why some people prefer that this verse is taken as referring to psalms, the book of psalms, the psalms put into meter as we sing them together. And that's what it's meant.

[30 : 46] So there is that difference of opinion over how we should take the verse. We're taking it at the moment that we are singing psalms of different catechises of psalms in praise to God.

But irrespective of what our view is of that, it's saying, sing with thankfulness in your hearts to God and sing together. That's really the main feature that we want to focus on this morning.

Sing together the praises of God in congregational singing. So what do we take from that? And if we want to take out a few points, these are just by way of introduction, a bit longer than usual.

But what do we take from that as we're looking at congregational singing and the churches gather to sing the praises of God? Well, first of all, our singing together is actually commanded by God.

It's not something that we choose to do or not to do. Our singing together, our congregational singing, and our individual contribution to that is commanded by God.

[31 : 47] All you've got to do is look through the book of psalms. And as you look through the book of psalms, you'll find so many psalms in which God is purposefully commanding or instructing His people to sing, to glorify His name with singing, to be together involved in the singing of His praise.

Many, many times you'll find that in the book of psalms. Not only that, but you'll find the likes of Psalm 79, verse 1, Psalm 147. Not only does it say that it's something we must do as commanded by God, as instructed by God, but that it is good for us to do so.

You see, some people think, when you think of, when we actually look at the fact that the Bible is instructing us to do many things, in other words, God is commanding us, a lot of people think, well, commanding things, that's not really how it should, it should be voluntary, shouldn't it?

It should be something that we're willing to do of ourselves. Well, that's all very well, but sometimes we need God's command. We need God's command to actually make us think about what we should be doing and our responsibilities.

But when you come to Psalm 92, for example, it is a good thing to sing the praises of God. It's good for us and it brings good to us. And it's good in the sense that God Himself is being praised, something which He regards as good.

[33 : 14] It's a good thing to praise the Lord every morning, every evening, as that psalm says. In other words, the Bible doesn't just say God requires us to sing His praises, but God emphasizes what a good thing it is, what a beneficial thing it is.

Not just good emotionally, but it brings benefit. We'll deal with that point in a minute. It is good for us to sing the praises of God as instructed by God.

And in fact, you come to this passage and the corresponding passage in Ephesians chapter 5. You'll find in Ephesians that that's the same kind of emphasis there where singing praises to God is something that's actually required or commanded by God as an aspect of the new life that we've come to have through faith in Christ.

But here is Colossians here in chapter 3 saying, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another. That's an instruction from God. You go back even to verse 6 of the chapter there and you'll find the command is there as well on account of where you find, sorry, not verse 6, you have to put away all these things he's saying, the things that now characterize the life that you actually once lived.

And then he moves on through from there, right through to this command as instruction to praise the Lord and to do so with singing as well as also with thankfulness in our hearts.

[34 : 45] Singing praise is not an optional aspect of worship. It's something that's required by God as an essential part of how we worship Him together as well as worshipping Him individually.

And as we've said, even if we're not, wouldn't class ourselves as singers, wouldn't class ourselves as having a good voice. It's not really the important thing. You see what I was saying there? With thankfulness in your hearts to God.

It's not primarily a matter of our quality of voice, though that is good, is gifted by God. It's the heart really, as we'll see, that the inward soul from which our singing emanates.

But it's important to realize that singing, singing praise to God is commanded by God, required by God. It's an instruction from God.

Secondly, our singing together expresses important realities. Through singing the praise of God, we express things, especially as they're revealed to us in the Bible, we express things that are important realities, I've called it, to ourselves.

[35 : 58] And I'm going to focus on two things, especially in that. The important realities, first of all, God's character and His works. And then secondly, our own experiences.

Because we sing about God's character, we sing to Him in praise of His character and His works, but we also sing out our experiences.

And again, we'll see that from the book of Psalms. God's character and God's work frequently in the book of Psalms. Let me just pick on a couple, just as, I'm sure you're very well aware of these, I know.

Like, for example, Psalm 100. Make a joyful noise to the Lord. See, there's the instruction again, it's a commandment. Serve the Lord with gladness. Come into His presence with singing.

Why? For, know that He is God. He made us. We are His people. We are the sheep of His pasture. For the Lord is good. His steadfast love endured forever.

[37 : 00] His faithfulness to all generations. What is that saying to us? Saying to us, here are features of God's character and of God's work and of God's relationship with His people. So you sing praise in relation to that.

You take these great truths, these great realities, you build them into your praise as the psalmist is saying, and Lord, we know that you are a shepherd to your people. We know that you're our Savior.

We know that you've done all these and you continue to do all these things. So I sing praises because of that. Or you go to Psalm 136, the only other one I'm going to mention just now.

Psalm 136 is quite a remarkable psalm for the way that it repeats certain things all the way through. Give thanks to the Lord for He is good for His steadfast love endures forever.

Give thanks to the God of gods for His steadfast love endures forever. And that's the refrain throughout the psalm, for His steadfast love endures forever, repeated again and again just as a prominent note in the teaching of the psalm.

[38 : 06] But as you go through, you can see all the things that are related to that. God, the creator of the universe, God who dealt with the enemies of Israel, God who divided the Red Sea miraculously for them, God who overthrew Pharaoh, God led His people, and so on all the way down.

You see these great realities that are mentioned as God's character and God's work is revealed. What is our response to God's character and to God's work? Praise.

Singing is praise. Singing is praise together. Singing is praise congregationally. And when you go to Exodus chapter 15, there are the people just newly out of Egypt and having gone through the Red Sea and seen the Egyptians pursuing them and God in His judgment bringing the sea over the Egyptians to destroy them in the Red Sea.

And what did Israel do? What did Moses do? Well, you read there the beginning of chapter 15 of Exodus. Then Moses and Israel sang this song. And the rest of the chapter is the song that they sang.

They sang praise to God as they looked at what had happened and what they were singing about. They were celebrating victory, but they were celebrating God's victory.

[39 : 31] They were celebrating God's actions. They were celebrating God's greatness. Yes, He had preserved them. He had led them. He had kept them safe. But He's the one to be praised.

And they're singing the praises of God as they sang this song described in Exodus 15. And you know, remarkably, you can take that right through the whole Bible on into the book of Revelation and chapter 15.

And you read there something remarkable that the singing in heaven is the song of Moses and of the Lamb. The song of Moses and of the Lamb.

In other words, the same celebratory, triumphant note in singing from Exodus through to Revelation, from this world right through to heaven.

It's the praise of God. Isn't it precious that eternity is going to be spent for God's people?

[40 : 32] Singing praise to God. Yes, there'll be other things, but that's a prominent feature of what heaven is going to be about. Singing the praises of God. Singing the song of Moses and of the Lamb of Jesus.

Celebrating God's triumphant victory over sin, over Satan, over death by the cross and the resurrection of Christ. That's the song of heaven.

But it's sung song. It's congregational song. It's everybody participating in the praise of God. And what we're doing here on earth in this world as we sing of the character and the works of God is anticipating the glorious singing of heaven.

What a privilege. What a privilege to be a participant in a congregation that sings the praise of God. God. And the praise this morning, the singing this morning, I have to say, was, as it usually, very good.

And it's especially so when certain harmonies come through in the singing. And there's that quality of sung praise which reflects our gratitude, our thankfulness to God.

[41 : 46] God. So, you see, our present praise of God is actually linked to the past, to God's great works of redemption in the past, but it also links us to the future, to what's going to be true in heaven.

So, here you are today, a congregation of people who sing the praise of God, and you're conscious that you're connected to the praises of God in the past for His character and for His works, and you're also conscious you're connected to the future for God's people, the singing of heaven.

It's the same praise, the same God, the same privilege, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Now, what does that give us when we do that together? What does that do more so than when we sing by ourselves, good though that is?

Well, doesn't it convey together, because it's being done together, doesn't it really convey a great sense of wonder that God should be this God to us, that God should have done all these things for us?

[42 : 59] And doesn't it convey as well as this sense of wonder as we sing together, doesn't it convey a sense of belonging? Isn't it as you come together to praise the Lord more so than when you sing on your own, that you have that sense of belonging to this people who praise the Lord, belonging to this people whose privilege it is to sing the praises of God together?

Our singing together expresses the important realities of God's character and God's works, but secondly, it also expresses the reality of our experiences.

as you go to the book of Psalms again, you find sadness and joy side by side. So many of the Psalms express the joy of David and the other psalmists as they collectively, as they sang the praises of God with the people of God, the joy, I joyed when to the house of God, go up, they said to me.

And so many of the Psalms have those wonderful features of praise and thankfulness and joy in their praise.

Psalms 27, the Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life. Of whom shall I be afraid?

[44 : 26] Triumph! Joy! Joy! And all the way through the Psalms, you have that note of joy prominently displayed. The reality of joy in our experience.

But there's the other side. You don't just sing the praises of God when you're joyous, when your heart is glad, when you feel lifted up. You sing the praises of God when you're sad, when your heart is heavy, when you have something to be grieved about.

That's what the Psalms teach us. Psalm 38, for example. You see how that, all the way through that Psalm, really, it's pretty much a note of sadness.

Lord, rebuke me not in your anger, not discipline me in your wrath. He's talking there, of course, of his sins as the Psalm goes on to speak about his own personal sense of sinfulness and guilt.

There is no soundness in my flesh. My iniquities have gone over my head like a heavy burden. They are too heavy for me. My sighing is not hidden from you.

[45 : 33] My friends and companions stand aloof from my plague. My nearest kin stand afar off. All the way through the Psalm, you've got these notes again and again of sadness, of despondency, and of grief in his heart.

But then you stop, you see, and you say, well, that's a Psalm that God has given us to sing together. You don't just confine your singings to the Psalms of exuberance and of joy.

It's a privilege to sing them, but it's equally a privilege to be able to sing together from sad hearts, from hearts that experience the pains of this life, the challenges of this life, the struggles of this life, the losses of this life as well as the gains.

But you see, here's a great privilege. We can sing these out to God and we can sing them out together to God. We share together in the singing of our sorrows as well as the singing of our joys.

And what a difference that makes to you as an individual that you're singing together with other people who together as you sing the praises of God, whether in sadness or in joy, we're all together in the singing.

[46 : 53] We're all together in the praise. We're saying to one another as we sing our praises to God, Lord, collectively, hear us today because our heart is going out to you.

I think the more I've gone on in my Christian experience, the more I've come to value and to appreciate the benefit we receive from singing together even when it's times of singing out our pains.

Just to know that someone else is singing with you and wanting to participate with you and to share with you in the sorrow of your heart as well as the joys of your heart, isn't that therapeutic?

Isn't that really in a sense strengthening and confirmatory? And doesn't it give you again that sense of great privilege and wonder and thankfulness to God that you belong to that kind of body of people who share together in their experiences and whose experiences are shared out together in song, in singing the praises of God?

You see, that goes back to what we said at the very beginning, the importance of actually being together, gathering together instead of just being as we are able to at times join in with services online, but that should be a secondary issue.

[48 : 23] It should be for those who can't be together and it's a great facility to have and I keep saying this, it's a wonderful facility to have and I hear more and more of people in different parts of the world who actually come to join in with the services here of this congregation who are maybe not able to go to a service elsewhere themselves or even our own local people who can't because of illness or whatever cannot actually physically be there but when we can then we should.

When we can, here's one of the benefits that we are able to join together in the praise of God, that our voices come to be joined together as we share the experiences of this life.

Singing with thankfulness in your heart to God. So our singing together is commanded by God. Our singing together expresses important realities, God's character and work, our own experiences.

Thirdly, finally, our singing together contributes to our encouragement. It's obvious that we are able to encourage one another as we meet physically rather than at other times.

Yes, you can encourage many people with a phone call, with a WhatsApp or whatever, but it doesn't actually replace the physical connection as we share together to encourage one another in relation to the things of life.

[49 : 52] So as we reflect on the goodness of God, the gifts of God, the mercy of God, the salvation of God, again you go back to the Psalms and this is what you find frequently, that as they shared together in the experiences of life and their knowledge of God, so they were encouraged and encouraged one another as they actually traveled together on the issues, through the issues of life.

Psalm 103, what does the psalmist do? He's doing something which some people might think is a sign of beginning to lose yourself. He's talking to himself. O thou my soul, bless God the Lord.

He's talking into his soul. He's speaking to his soul. He's speaking to himself and he's saying, bless the Lord. Praise the Lord. And then he goes on to express why he's praising God.

Don't be forgetful of all his gracious benefits that he has bestowed upon you. Who forgives all your sins. Who heals you from all your diseases.

By that he means, of course, ultimately spiritually. And so the psalm goes on. But as the psalmist speaking into his soul, so that out from his soul will come the praises of God.

[51 : 06] And as we reflect on all of what God has done and is doing for us, as together we're sharing in our knowledge of God and the experiences in his providence that we come to share in.

Well, he's saying here, sing from your hearts with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Our singing is not just a formalized following of a certain score of music.

Nothing wrong with that in itself at all. But you see, he's reminding us that our singing begins here in the heart and our soul. That the soul is the source of our sound praise to God.

That as each of us looks into our soul and finds reasons to praise the Lord, whether in sadness or in gladness, God is still the same. And as we find these reasons and as we find these experiences and as we see in the Bible all that's true about God himself and what he means to us, well, you see, our heart is moved.

Our soul is stirred and out from our soul comes praise in the worship of God together, collectively.

[52 : 26] So we draw from our experiences. And as we draw from our experiences, we channel that into our praise. And something else that just in passing is important, but it is important, that means we think about the words of what we sing.

That we don't just, and because we're so used to the Psalms, it is a danger for us always, of course, that we get so used to things that we fail to then just think properly and deeply about them.

But we should always begin saying to ourselves, before we ever come to start the singing as the Psalm is set before us, sometimes we read the verses all together, sometimes not.

But in any case, as we're singing it, our prayer should be, Lord, help me to think about what I'm singing. Help me to think so that my heart will truly be stirred, so that I will have from my soul meaningfully the praise that has thought about these great words that you have given me to sing, so that they are meaningful to me, so that they increasingly come to be important to me in singing your praises.

And so, we can finish with Psalm 59, not to sing it, but just to quote from it just now. And the context, of course, is important. It's a context of severe difficulty for the psalmist.

[54 : 02] But then he goes on to say in verses 16 and 17 in the book of Psalms, verse 16. But I will sing of your strength. I will sing aloud of your steadfast love in the morning, for you have been to me a fortress and a refuge in the day of my distress.

O my strength, I will sing praises to you, for you, O God, are my fortress, the God who shows me steadfast love.

sing. Sing praise. Sing together. Sing to God's glory. Sing in reflection of what God has done, of who God is.

Sing out your experiences. Sing together the praises of God. Let us pray. Lord, we give thanks as we sing your praises, that we sing words that are meaningful to us, words that fit in with our experiences, words that convey to us something of your own greatness, your might, your power, words that we use, O Lord, to express our thanks and our dependence upon you.

We thank you that we can sing our joys to you, that we can sing our sorrows to you. We thank you for the privilege, Lord, of singing together, of praising the Lord as a congregation, and we pray that that may be reflected more and more as time goes by.

[55 : 40] We receive our thanks be with us throughout the remainder of the day and pardon our sin for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, we're going to sing again to God's praise in conclusion from Psalm 67.

Psalm 67 on page 84. And we're singing to the tune, Sussex, Psalm 67.

God, be merciful and bless us, shine upon us with your face, that the earth may know your actions and all lands your saving grace. O God, may the peoples praise you, may all peoples sing your praise, for you judge the nations justly, ruling over every race.

May they sing with joy and gladness, may they all rejoice as one. O God, may the peoples praise you as they all unite in song. Then the land will yield its harvest, God will pour his gifts abroad.

God, our God, will surely bless us, all the earth will fear our God. These verses, God, be merciful and bless us. God, be merciful and bless us, shine upon us with your face, that the earth may know your actions and the lands your saving grace.

[57 : 20] O God, may the peoples praise you, may all blem us sing your praise, for you judge the nations justly, ruling over every race.

May they sing with joy and gladness, may they all rejoice as one.

O God, may the peoples praise you, may the peoples praise you, may they all unite in song.

May they all unite in song. Then the land will yield its harvest, God will pour his gifts abroad.

God, our God, will surely bless us, all the earth will fear our God.

[58 : 50] I'll go to the main door again after the benediction. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.